

THE SĀTTĀDA ŚRĪVAIṢṆAVAS

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The Sāttāda Śrīvaiṣṇavas are a distinctive, though little-known, community of Teṅkalai Śrīvaiṣṇavas, spread throughout Tamilnadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, dedicated to temple service. The Sāttādas have a long history, perhaps from the time of Rāmānuja (11th c.), and guru-lineages and a literature dating from, at least, the fifteenth century. The evidence strongly suggests that they are descendents of both brahmins and non-brahmins who followed the anticaste Ālvār/Bhāgavata Vaiṣṇavism formalized by Piḷlai Lokācārya and Maṇavālamūnī—the brahmins renouncing their sacred thread and top-knot and, thereby, the performance of Vedic rites, in favor of temple service and life-cycle rituals and pūjās engaging songs of the Ālvārs in place of Vedic mantras. From the eleventh through the sixteenth centuries Sāttādas enjoyed supervisory status in many of the most important Śrīvaiṣṇava temples.

INTRODUCTION

THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF ŚRĪVAIṢṆAVA HINDUISM lies not only in the fact that it gives special attention to the female mode of the godhead (*śrī*), but also in its claim to inspiration by both the Sanskrit Veda and the devotional poems of the twelve devotees known as Ālvārs (650–850 C.E.)—considered to be the Tamil Veda. The two vedas are not of equal weight for all Śrīvaiṣṇavas—Vāṭakalai, or Northern-branch, Śrīvaiṣṇavism gives precedence to the Sanskrit and Teṅkalai, or Southern-branch, Śrīvaiṣṇavism to the Tamil; nonetheless both lineages of theologians come to speak of their theology as *ubhaya vedānta*—"the wisdom of both" the Tamil Veda and the Sanskrit Veda. Among the Ālvārs—one female and eleven males, at least five are non-brahmin and it is the works of one of these, Nammālvār, a śūdra, that most properly constitute the Tamil Veda. The literature of both the northern and southern lineages stipulates that mokṣa is by the grace of the supreme Lord through rituals open to both male and female members of all castes, and theologians of the southern lineage expressly criticize those Vaiṣṇavas who attribute significance to caste status.

At the same time, it appears that the entire lineage of theologians, on both the Teṅkalai and Vāṭakalai sides, from the beginning (Nāthamuni, c. 900) to the present, is brahmin. Sociological and ritual studies show that both Teṅkalai and Vāṭakalai brahmins consider the maintenance of caste purity important and continue to perform the prescribed Vedic rituals—and that those who administer initiatory rites (*dikṣā*), as well as Śrīvaiṣṇava temple priests, are invariably brahmin. Indeed, the rather extensive scholarly literature describing and interpreting

Śrīvaiṣṇavism represents it as essentially a brahmin tradition. Non-brahmin devotees are mentioned, sometimes prominently, in the traditional accounts of the lives of the early theologians (*guruparamparāprabhāva* [Tam. *kuruparamparaippirapāvam*]) and in temple chronicles (*oḷuku*), but then disappear from or, at the least, appear to have had no significance for the later movement.

My "discovery" of the Sāttāda Śrīvaiṣṇavas sheds some light on who some of these devotees were and what happened to them; and it significantly alters our understanding both of contemporary Śrīvaiṣṇavism and of its historical development. The Sāttādas are not only a sizeable, distinctive contemporary community—a *jāti*—of non-brahmin Śrīvaiṣṇavas, but a community with a lengthy history, a guru-lineage and a substantial literature—a heritage which, though now subdued, still plays a significant part in and had a major impact on the historical development of Śrīvaiṣṇava Hinduism.

PRESENT DAY SĀTTĀDAS

V. Śrīnivāsa-ayya¹ is a full-time servant to the Śrīraṅganāthaswāmi Temple, Śrīraṅgam, the chief temple for Śrīvaiṣṇavas. His duties include opening the curtain

¹ *ayya* is an honorific common among Sāttāda Śrīvaiṣṇavas. It is used in the south as a term of respect.

The data on present day Sāttādas presented here was gathered by interview of Sāttāda leaders residing at various Śrīvaiṣṇava centers throughout Tamilnadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, during the summer of 1988. Many of the interviews were facilitated by A. Tiruveṅgadhān, Professor of Sanskrit at Vaishnava College, Madras. This research was supported by a grant

to the main sanctum at the commencement of daily worship (*pūjā*), providing and offering the flower garland for presentation to the deity and guiding the placement of it by the priest (*arcaka*), assembling the worshippers for receipt of *prasāda* and maintaining order during the distribution, and acting as "herald" (Tam. *kaṭṭiyakkāran*)—announcing the commencement and conclusion of all processions of the deity.² Only he and the government-appointed overseer hold the key to the door of the inner sanctum. In performing his duties, Śrīnivāsa is following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather and other males of his family line, and is training his eldest son to succeed him. He claims that this lineage of temple service dates back to at least the 11th century, when the great *ācārya*, Rāmānuja, in reorganizing temple activities, appointed his ancestors to these duties; or, perhaps, confirmed them in duties they were already performing.

Śrīnivāsa-ayya is the elder-leader of a distinctive community (twelve families) of servants to the Śrīraṅgam temple known as Sāttāda Śrīvaiṣṇavas—a community that gains its livelihood from flower trade, the sale of *prasāda* and a share of temple income. *Sāttāda/cāttāta* (masc. noun, *sāttādavan*), from Tamil *cāttu* "to wear," means "not wearing" and it is generally agreed that what is implied is not wearing the sacred thread (Skt. *yajñopavīta*; Tam. *pūṇūl*) or the top-knot (*śikhā*). Śrīraṅgam Sāttādas do not wear the thread, but some have the top-knot and Śrīnivāsa noted that, while he does not, his father used to wear the top-knot. The Sāttādas are otherwise known as "Kōyil [Temple]-Śrīvaiṣṇavas," the term being understood to mean, according to Śrīnivāsa, brahmin Śrīvaiṣṇavas who have given up Vedic rites in order to give their full attention to temple service. Indeed, the lifestyle of the Śrīraṅgam Sāttādas—diet, dress, household appointments, marriage considerations, etc.—is strongly similar to that of Tenkalai brahmin Śrīvaiṣṇavas; unlike the latter, they do not perform certain Vedic rites and they recite portions of the *Nālāyira Divya Prabandham* instead of Vedic mantras in their daily *pūjās* and rites of the life-cycle (*saṃskāra*). The five-fold rite of initiation (*pañca-saṃskāra dīkṣā*) authorized by the *Pāñca-rātrāgamas* and undertaken by all Śrīvaiṣṇavas is the *upanayana* for Sāttādas.³ Śrīraṅgam Sāttādas receive

initiation from Kōyil Aṇṇaṇ, a Śrīraṅgam *ācārya* belonging to the Kantātai family, which claims descent from Mutaliyāṇṇaṇ, a disciple of Rāmānuja. This arrangement is recent, however; up to fifteen years ago, Sāttāda initiations were performed by the head (*maṭhādhipati*) of the Kantātai Rāmānuja Mutt⁴ at Śrīraṅgam, which belongs to the Sāttāda tradition. As we shall see, this mutt was founded by a Sāttāda disciple of a Kantātai *ācārya*, in the fifteenth century. The head of this mutt, the last one of which was Śrīnivāsa's uncle, is a renunciate bearing the title *Ekāṅgi Swāmi*. According to Śrīnivāsa, the candidate for this office is elected such by other Sāttādas and is inducted into *saṃnyāsa* by the head (titled, *jīyar*) of the Śrīraṅga Nārāyaṇa Mutt.⁵

The Śrīraṅgam Sāttādas are not a unique phenomenon; there are Sāttāda Śrīvaiṣṇavas throughout Tamilnadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, some of them

Sanskrit—none of which has received scholarly attention. I am aware of the following: 1) the *Śrīvaiṣṇavasamayācārāṇiṣ-kaṣaṇam*, "A Compendium of Śrīvaiṣṇava Practice," by Periya Jīyar, with a commentary by Piḷḷai Lokam Jīyar (c. 1550) [a disciple of Maṇavālamāmuni, brother of Paravastu Bhaṭṭar Pirān Jīyar, and author of the *Yatindrapravaṇaprabhāvam*, a biography of Maṇavālamāmuni] (Madras: Srinivasa Press, 1911); 2) the *Sampradāyacandrikā* of Bhaṭṭanātha Munindra (also a disciple of Maṇavālamāmuni), describing the religious life of the *paramaikāntin*; 3) the *Samayācāra-curukum* of Śrīmat Vādikēsari Veṅkaṭācārya, which defines various types of renunciation (n.p., 1894); 4) the *Śrīvaiṣṇavasiddhāntadīpikā* of Vadhula Kantātai Rāmānujācārya, the seventh jīyar of the Paravastu Mutt, evidently written to establish the lineage of this Mutt as a lineage to Nammālvār, revived by Rāmānuja [see p. 14 and n. 31]; 5) The *Sāttāda-śrīvaiṣṇavaśodaśaprayogagraṇtha* of Śrī Veṅkaṭācāryulu, the sixth jīyar of the Paravastu lineage, which details the sixteen rituals of the life-cycle—from a glance, it is evident that the ritual forms are Smārta, but hymns of the Ālvārs rather than Vedic mantras are to be chanted, and the *pañca-saṃskāra* or fivefold Śrīvaiṣṇava *dīkṣā* takes the place of *upanayana*; 6) the *Prapannānuṣṭhānabhāskaram* (Light on the Practice of a Prapanna), by V. Rāmānuja Ayyangār (Tirucci: Siṅgaram Press, 1934), which describes daily and special rituals, very much as they are described in a Śrīvaiṣṇava brahmin manual, except that the songs of the Ālvārs replace Vedic mantras.

⁴ A mutt (Tam. *maṭam*; Skt. *maṭha*) is an organization by which certain persons' worship-interests are represented at the temple. Śrīvaiṣṇava mutts are usually presided over by a *saṃnyāsi* called a *jīyar* "lion" (*cīyam/simha*) or an *ekāṅgi*.

⁵ This information is corroborated by K. Gnanambal, "Śrīvaiṣṇavas and Their Religious Institution," *Bulletin of the Anthropological Survey of India* XX (1977): 117.

from the National Endowment for the Humanities, administered by the American Institute of Indian Studies.

² In the latter capacity, he carries a large silver cane and is accompanied by bearers of a large and distinctively fashioned torch.

³ There is a substantial literature representing Sāttāda Śrīvaiṣṇavism—texts in Kannada, Telugu and Tamil as well as

serving large temples in a manner similar to the Śrīraṅgam Sāttādas, others serving as overseers (*dharmakārṭṭ*) and/or priests (*arcaka*) to small temples, and still others who once served the temple but now gain a livelihood by other means. Sāttādas are sometimes referred to as *dāsa-nambi* [Tam. *tācanampi*], “respected servant.” The Sāttādas of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka are commonly known as “Sātānis”, a variant of *sāttāda*.

Another Śrīnivāsa-ayya is the elder of twenty-two families of Sāttādas at Śrīvilliputtūr, ten of which are engaged in service to the Śrīraṅgamannār temple. In addition to his duties as herald, performing which he, like Śrīraṅgam Śrīnivāsa-ayya, carries a silver cane and is accompanied by bearers of a large torch, Śrīnivāsa daily prepares a leaf and straw parrot for the hand of Āṇṭāl, who stands to the right of Lord Raṅgamannār in the sanctuary. Śrīvilliputtūr Śrīnivāsa also exercises “the Kelvi [*kēḷvi*] office”⁶ in removing the deity’s garland at the end of procession. Other Sāttādas at Śrīvilliputtūr guard the jewel-treasury and the hundi (chest for monetary offerings) and guard and maintain the deities’ vehicles (*vāhana*). Śrīnivāsa receives food and a modest monthly stipend for his services. Those in charge of the jewel-treasury live on the income from land gifted to them by the temple. The Śrīvilliputtūr Sāttādas live near the center of the village surrounding the temple, next out from the arcakas; an indication of their relatively high status. Two of the twenty-two families at Śrīvilliputtūr are Telugu-speaking; the other twenty, Tamil-speaking. The two groups live on opposite sides of the temple and have quite distinct roles—the Telugu Sāttādas performing the relatively less prestigious duties of looking after the food-stores, lighting lamps and sealing locks at night. Recently, there has been some intermarriage between the groups.

Vāṇamāmalai Tothādri, a Telugu Sāttāda whose grandfather came from Śrīvilliputtūr, is the sole Sāttāda servant at the Vāṇamāmalai temple, Nāṅguneri, the headquarters of the Vāṇamāmalai Mutt. He performs essentially the same services as the above mentioned Śrīnivāsas, in addition, enjoying the privilege of singing praises to Nammālvār after the *Iyal Kōṣṭi* [*Gōṣṭhi*]⁷ has concluded. On special occasions, such as

Vaikuṇṭha Ekādaśī,⁸ he is addressed as “Rayar Rāmānuja Dāsar”; *rayar*⁹ is a royal title in use during Vijayanagar rule and revealing of the fact that this Sāttāda’s ancestors were agents of the crown.

The brothers Devapirān and Śrīnivāsan Sāttādavar serve at the Ādhi Nādhā Perumāl temple, Āḷvār Tirunagari, performing the same duties as Vāṇamāmalai Tothādri and, in addition, enjoying the status of consultants on temple affairs. They receive a regular stipend and are honored each year at the conclusion of Vaikuṇṭha Ekādaśī. The elder brother wears the top-knot. Chakrappāṇi Dharmakārttar is one of two Sāttādas serving the Tirukōṣṭiyūr temple.¹⁰ He provides flowers for pūjā and keeps account of the temple-stores. His ceremonial name is “Bhaṭṭar Pirān Dāsan.”¹¹ The Tirukōṣṭiyūr Sāttādas—three families—intermarry with the Sāttādas of Śrīvilliputtūr, Nāṅguneri, and Āḷvār Tirunagari.

A. C. Narasimha is the elder of two Telugu-speaking families of Sāttādas serving the Śrīperumbudūr temple, providing flower garlands and guarding the image (*tirumēṇi-kāval*, “divine-body protection”) and jewels. Narasimha wears the thread; his father before him wore both thread and *śikhā*. He reports that in his community the *upanayana* is performed with songs of the Āḷvārs rather than Vedic mantras.

Most of the Sāttādas who are engaged in temple service serve as arcakas or as overseers (*dharmakārṭṭ*) in small village temples or the less-prominent city temples. Often, the two functions are performed by one and the same person. J. Kannaiyarāmānuja Dāsan of Madurai has a land endowment to support his service as arcaka to a small temple outside the city. His father and grandfather served this temple before him. His maternal uncle is overseer of a similar rural temple. The brothers Rāghavan and Konnapa own and control a Tirumalaisai Āḷvār temple adjacent to the main temple at Kumbhakonam. They say the temple is the Āḷvār’s *samādhi* and was built by their ancestors. Although there are twenty families of Sāttādas at Kumbhakonam, none are in service to the main temple (Śārngapāṇi [Tam. Cāraṅkapāṇi] Perumāl Kōyil). Some are native

⁶ Judiciary oversight; *kēḷvi*, “question, judiciary inquiry.”

⁷ *Iyal* refers to the non-musical portion of the *Nālāyira Divya Prabandham* which is chanted in a particular metrical style by a select group (*gōṣṭhi*) of devotees.

⁸ One of the most important Śrīvaiṣṇava temple festivals, beginning on the eleventh (*ekādaśī*) of the month of Vaiṣākha (Dec.–Jan.).

⁹ Derived from Tamil, *araiyar* “king/ruler,” which, in turn, is related to *aracu*, Skt., *rājā*.

¹⁰ The temple where, it is said, Rāmānuja revealed the secret mantra from the balcony.

¹¹ *Paṭṭar pirāṇ*, “lord of the learned,” is a title associated with Periyālvār, who served the Lord by providing flowers for worship. *Dāsan* means “servant.” The name also connects Chakrappāṇi with the founder of the Paravastu Mutt, Tirupati, in the early sixteenth century.

speakers of Telugu and some of Tamil; the Telugu Sāttādas wear the sacred thread.

N. Varada-ayya, now in retirement from railroad service, says that his father, Nammālvārayya, grandfather (Varada-ayya), great-grandfather (Nammālvārayya) and great-great grandfather (Tiruveṅgadathān) served as overseer and arcaka at a Varadarāja temple near Tiruchirappalli. His father also served as ācārya to Sāttādas and Naidus. His great-great grandfather was originally from Tirupati.

In the Coimbatore and Salem districts of Tamilnadu, there are numerous Hanumān temples controlled and served by Sāttādas. My informants commonly remarked that Sāttādas give special honor to the servants and insignia of Viṣṇu; considering themselves "servants of the servants" (*dāsānudāsa*) of the Lord, they worship Hanumān, Garuḍa, the Discus (*sudarśana*), Conch (*pāñcajanya*) and Forehead-mark (Tam. *nāmam*).

Sāttādas of Karnataka and Andhra states typically serve as pūjāris/arcakas to small temples. There are no Sāttādas serving the major temples of Tirumalai-Tirupati and one family performs minor service to the Tirunārāyaṇa temple at Melkote, providing flowers and *nāmam*-clay. A number of small temples in southeastern Karnataka state have "Nammālvār" mutts which belong to Sāttādas and reportedly were once served by Sāttāda jīyars. Throughout the three-state area, a significant number of Sāttādas, some in temple service and some in secular work, function as ācāryas and purohitas to the Sāttāda community and various lower caste Śrīvaiṣṇavas.

The Sāttādas are Teṅkalai Śrīvaiṣṇavas. Most have received their initiation (*pañca-saṃskāra*) from the Kōyil Aṇṇa ācārya-lineage of Śrīraṅgam; some are disciples of the Vāṇamāmalai Mutt, Nāṅguneri, and others belong to the Paravastu Mutt, Tirupati. They consider themselves a distinct *jāti*, with numerous subdivisions—they have a traditional vocation, intermarry along well-defined lines within the Sāttāda community and enjoy a distinct ritual status. Over the past seventy years, Sāttādas have formed local, state and national associations for uplift (*abhyudaya*) of the community. According to the souvenir¹² published on the occasion of the most recent (1980) national conference, six previous All India Sāttāda Śrīvaiṣṇava Conferences were held, dating back to 1921.

Who are the Sāttādas? In the situations I surveyed, in most circumstances of ranking, Sāttādas rank below Śrī-

vaiṣṇava brahmins and above all other castes. In a few major¹³ temples, certain Sāttādas are regularly honored (receive *prasāda*, etc.) ahead of certain brahmins. In a sizable number of major temples, Sāttādas receive high honors on special occasions, such as Vaikuṇṭha Ekādaśī. It can be argued, as, indeed, some brahmins as well as some Sāttādas do, that the Sāttādas are brahmins who gave up the thread and top-knot, either or both, in order to give full attention to temple service (*kōyil-kaiṅkariya*) and/or to honor the egalitarian "Bhāgavata" theology of Piḷlai Lōkācārya and his commentator, Maṇavālamāmuni. It can also be argued, as many non-Sāttādas do and some Sāttādas concede, that the latter are śūdras, mixed castes, or both, who established themselves as "pure" (at least, *purer* than other non-brahmins), either or both by once having control of major temples or by reason of inspiration by the Piḷlai Lokācārya/Maṇavālamāmuni theology and *pāñcarātra dīkṣā*. With respect to either of these scenarios, Sāttāda Śrīvaiṣṇavism may have arisen during or just after the time of Maṇavālamāmuni (1370–1445), or it may represent the continuation of a very old *bhāgavata* (*sātvata* corrupted to *sāttāda*?) Vaiṣṇavism inspiring and inspired by the Ālvārs, and progressively "taken over" by certain *smārta* brahmins.¹⁴

¹³ "Major," one of the 108 temples celebrated by the Ālvārs and thus known as *divya-deśa* ("most sanctified place").

¹⁴ The Census of India for Madras Presidency and Mysore, for the years 1871, 1891, 1901, 1911, 1921 and 1931, contains remarks on Sāttādas and Sātānis. The earliest of these accounts (1871) describes Sātānis as being persons who are:

... frequently religious mendicants, priests of inferior temples, minstrels, sellers of flowers used as offerings, etc., and having probably recruited their numbers by the admission into their ranks of individuals who have been excommunicated from higher castes. [p. 159]

The 1891 account defines Sātāni/Sāttāda as "... a class of temple servants," "Teṅkalai Vaiṣṇavites," "śūdras." It explains the origin of the category by reference to Rāmānuja's division of Vaiṣṇavas into *sāttinavan*, who are "... invariably Brahman ..."; and *sāttādavan*, who are "... invariably Śūdras. ..."

They shave their heads completely and tie their lower cloth like a Brahman bachelor. In their ceremonies they more or less follow the Brahmins, but the sacred thread is not worn by them. ... The principal occupations of Sātānis are making garlands, carrying the torches during the god's procession, and sweeping the temple floor. They also make umbrellas, flower baskets and boxes of palmyra leaves, and prepare the sacred balls of white

¹² *Abhyudayam*, published on the occasion of Seventh All India Sāttāda Śrīvaiṣṇava Conference, Bangalore, December 13–14, 1980.

HISTORY

There can be no doubt that Sāttāda Śrīvaiṣṇavism has a long history and that Sāttādas enjoyed greater status in Śrīvaiṣṇava temples in times past than they do today. The number of temples served by Sāttādas and the number of Sāttāda families serving where services continue, have significantly declined over the last fifty years. Gōvinda Tāda, a schoolteacher at Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi, remembers when Sāttādas served at the Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi temple and that his father's house in Nānguneri was an honored stopping place for the Iyal Gōṣṭhī, when proceeding outside the temple. According to Śrīnivāsa, the number of Sāttādas at Śrīraṅgam was much larger in earlier times; some of those who left Śrīraṅgam went to serve other temples and some sought a livelihood outside of temple service. Privileges have been cancelled or, at least, eroded. Śrīraṅgam Sāttādas recited alongside brahmin Śrīvaiṣṇavas in the Iyal Gōṣṭhī up to 1942, when the privilege was cut off by legal action. Present day Sāttādas say that their ancestors were in charge of the major Śrīvaiṣṇava temples of south India, as *dharmakārṭṭ* or *śrīkāryakārṭṭ* (Tam. *śrīkāriyakarṭṭan*), and that, in a few of these temples, they served as arcakas. Chakrappāṇi Dharmakārṭṭar (as his name suggests) says that his ancestors, who used the title "*tātan*" (Tamil for *dāsa*), served as *dharmakārṭṭ* to the Tirukoṣṭiyūr temple 150 years ago. This is corroborated by a document of the court,¹⁵ dated 1851, which indicates that a Sāttāda

clay and saffron powder. Their usual agnomen is 'Aiya'. [pp. 269–70]

This account, with the possible exception of the designation of Sātānis as *śūdras*, is quite consistent with the findings of my Tamilnadu survey. The census indicates 145 sub-divisions of Sātānis, including "Sāttāda," "Dāsanambi," "Dāsa," "Kulaśekara Vaiṣṇavan," and "Rāmānuja-maṭam." The 1891 census of Mysore indicates that certain Sātānis rejected being labelled "*śūdra*" and sued (unsuccessfully) for defamation of character; they preferred enrollment as "Prathama Vaiṣṇava" ("First/original Vaiṣṇava") or "Nambi Veṅkaṭapura Vaiṣṇava," the latter name associating them with Tirupati and, according to present day Veṅkaṭapura Śrīvaiṣṇavas at Melkote, a brahmin community. The 1931 census for Mysore lists only "Sātāni" and records a request from certain Sātānis that they be listed as "Sāttāda Śrīvaiṣṇavas." The request was rejected "... because Śrī Vaiṣṇava is the distinctive name of one group of 'Brahmins' and the Sātāni community is not generally treated as a Brahmin community" (*Census of India* [Mysore, Bangalore, 1932], 25.1:318).

¹⁵ On file at the temple office.

was currently *dharmakārṭṭ* and entitled to receive one-tenth of the pūjā-income. Vāṇamāmalai Tothādri does not receive honors in the distribution of prasādam at the Vāṇamāmalai temple; but the recitation that accompanies the distribution of prasādam makes reference to two Sāttādas, Lakshman Dāsar and Ilaiyālvar Dāsar, who, at some time past, occupied the position of *dharmakārṭṭ* and were entitled to fourth place honors.

K. N. Muthurāju, of Bangalore, whose grandfather came from Kāñcīpuram to serve as pūjāri in a Kolar temple, east of Bangalore, and whose brother now serves this temple, is president of the All India Sāttāda Śrīvaiṣṇava Federation. Muthurāju claims, as do the Sāttādas serving temples near Melkote, that up to 150 years ago the main temples at Melkote—Yoga Narasiṃha and Tirunārāyaṇa—had Sāttāda arcakas. He points out that the Paravastu Mutt at Tirumalai is a Sāttāda mutt and shows the one-time prominence of Sāttādas at Tirupati-Tirumalai. N. A. Rāmasāmi, a retired teacher and an elder of the Sāttāda community of Melkote known as the Veṅkaṭapuram Śrīvaiṣṇavas, says there are 150 families of Tamil-speaking Sāttādas in Karnataka. They are originally from Tirupati (Veṅkaṭapuram) and came to Mysore from Śrīraṅgam. According to Rāmasāmi, from among these families, the Ajjanakattu family used to serve as pūjāris at the Yoga Narasiṃha temple and the Modur family performed pūjā at the Tirunārāyaṇa temple. The former still reside at Melkote and make their living by practicing āyurvedic medicine and astrology and overseeing the processing of white clay found only at Melkote and especially desired by Śrīvaiṣṇavas for marking the *nāmam* on the body. The latter are now farmers in the area surrounding Melkote. Tirunārāyaṇa temple registers available with Araiya Rāma Sharma, a brahmin in service to the temple, show that Sāttādas, identified at Melkote by the honorific "*ayya*," were prominent in service to the temple throughout the 19th century.

Kantātai Rāmānuja Ayyangār

There is substantial inscriptional evidence for Sāttāda prominence at Śrīraṅgam, Tirupati-Tirumalai and Kāñcīpuram (Varadarājasvāmi temple) during the 15th and 16th centuries, under the leadership of one Kantātai Rāmānuja Dāsar (c. 1430–1496), alias Kantātai Rāmānuja Ayyangār¹⁶ or Kantātai Ayodhyā Rāmānuja Ayyangār (hereafter, KRA). The earliest notice of KRA is in a

¹⁶ This may be the earliest occurrence of the honorific *ayyangār* or *ayyangāru*, later used only by Śrīvaiṣṇava brahmins. The form is of Telugu derivation.

Tirumalai inscription dated 1456,¹⁷ in which it is said that Kantātai Rāmānujayan, the disciple of Aḷakiyamaṇavāḷa Jiyar, is the trustee (*kārṭṭ*) of *rāmānujakūṭams* (feeding houses for pilgrims, in commemoration of Rāmānujācārya), constructed by the Vijayanagara ruler, Saluva Narasiṃha, at Tirumalai and Tirupati. Numerous inscriptions, thereafter to 1495, refer to him as “Kantātai Rāmānujayangār, disciple of Aḷakiyamaṇavāḷa Jiyar and manager of the Tirumalai-Tirupati *rāmānujakūṭams*.” These texts indicate that, 1) as the agent of Saluva Narasiṃha, he constructed and managed feeding houses at Śrīraṅgam and Varadarājasvāmi temple, Kāñcīpuram, as well as Tirumalai-Tirupati;¹⁸ 2) he became quite wealthy, himself financing a number of improvements to the temples;¹⁹ 3) in his later years he exercised considerable power over Tirumalai-Tirupati temple affairs as trustee of the Gold-treasury (*porpantāram*);²⁰ 4) he had disciples known as the “Sāttāda Ekāki Śrīvaiṣṇavas,” designated to administer the feeding houses and receive benefactions after his demise;²¹ and 5) his successors in the office of “Kantātai Ayyangār” held the office of *dharmakārṭṭ* at both Kāñcīpuram and Śrīraṅgam, for a time (discussed below).

KRA himself is not labelled “sāttāda” in the Tirumalai-Tirupati inscriptions. From the perspective of later Śrīvaiṣṇavism, one may take the honorific “ayyangār” [*aiyaṅkāṛ*] to indicate that he was a brahmin. “Brahmin” and “Sāttāda” are not necessarily contradictory, and even if they are, “ayyangār” doesn’t necessarily indicate “brahmin” in the fifteenth century, especially in light of the Sāttāda use of the abbreviated form “ayyaṅ.” The *Tirumalai Oḷuku* (Tirumalai temple chronicle) describes KRA as a Sāttāda, and the KRA Mutt at Śrīraṅgam is clearly a Sāttāda institution.

The name “Kantātai” connects KRA to Śrīraṅgam, either as a member or as a disciple of the Kantātai family of ācāryas established at Śrīraṅgam in descendance from

Kantātai Mudaliāṇḍān, cousin and disciple of Rāmānuja. The only possible inscriptional reference to KRA at Śrīraṅgam is a 1489 document recognizing a gift for the support of pūjā and charitable feeding by Kantātai Ayodhyā Rāmānujayangār, “. . . a Tiruvaraṅgam [Śrīraṅgam]-Temple Sāttāda Parama Ekāṅgi. . . .”²² This Kantātai Ayodhyā may be either Tirumalai-Tirupati KRA, under a variant name, or his disciple. The facts that other Rāmānujayangārs are specifically designated as disciples and successors to Tirumalai-Tirupati KRA (see below) and that we have clear evidence of the latter’s activity at Śrīraṅgam, argue for identity.

The *Kōyil Oḷuku* (chronicle of the Śrīraṅgam temple) says that Kantātai Rāmānuja was one Rāmarāja by name, elder brother of the Vijayanagara ruler Saluva Narasiṃha. Rāmarāja chose the religious life and, while on pilgrimage, took *saṃnyāsa* at Ayodhyā, where he also obtained several of the Lord Rāma’s gold coins and a powerful weapon called the *sparśa-vedhi* (“that which wounds by touch”). Returning to his brother’s palace, he presented the ruler with one of several gold coins and in return was granted the privilege of being honored with the *deśāntari mudrā* (“visitor’s seal of authority”) at any of the 108 *divyadeśas* of Śrīvaiṣṇavism. Thereafter, he traveled to Tirumalai, where he offered a coin and his credentials and took charge of all the shrines at that place. Coming to Śrīraṅgam in 1489, he offered a coin to Śrīraṅganātha, donned the vestment of an *ekāṅgi* and became a disciple of Kōyil Aṇṇaṇ (a Kantātai-lineage ācārya) with the *dāsyā*-name “Kantātai Rāmānuja Dāsar.” Exercising his royal grant, he became leader of the Śrīraṅgam *ekāṅgis*, possessor of the Añjaneya (Hanumān) *mudrā*—the most powerful *deśāntari mudrā* at Śrīraṅgam, and thereby became overseer (*śrikārya-kārṭṭ*)²³ of the entire Śrīraṅganāthasvāmi temple. In the latter capacity he performed numerous major services (*kaiṅkarya*) of new construction and reparation, such that the Lord (through the priest) titled him “Kulaśekhara Perumāl.” The chronicle account concludes with the remark that Kantātai Rāmānuja’s activities are the reason why, since his time, one of the *deśāntari ekāṅgis* has held the title of Kantātai Rāmānuja, has presided over a mutt, has branded visiting ascetics (*deśāntari vairāgi*) with the *deśāntari mudrā* and has regularly received a portion of the temple prasādam.²⁴

¹⁷ *Tirumalai-Tirupati Devasthanam Epigraphical Series*, vol. 2, no. 4, pp. 7–8 [= 2.4:7–8. Henceforth, references to this work will follow this abbreviated format.].

¹⁸ *TTDES* 2.13–14:17–18. KRA’s activity at Kāñcīpuram is confirmed by a Varadarājasvāmi temple inscription of 1487 noting that he was “. . . the trustee of the Rāmānuja-kūṭam on Sannidhi Street” (*South Indian Temple Inscriptions*, 1.348 [Madras: Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, 1953]). At about the same time—1489—we find reference to his activity at Śrīraṅgam, as discussed below.

¹⁹ For example: *TTDES*, 2.128:289–91.

²⁰ For example: *TTDES*, 2.134:310–15.

²¹ For example: *TTDES*, 2.22:35–36.

²² *Annual Report of Epigraphy* (Government of Madras, 1939), 13.

²³ *Senāpatidurantara* and *dharmakārṭṭ* are equivalent terms.

²⁴ *Kōyilōḷuku*, ed. Sri Krishnaswami Ayyangar Swami (Tiruchchi: Srinivasam Press, 1976), 92–96. *Kōil Oḷugu*, tr. V. N. Hari Rao (Madras: Rochouse & Sons, 1961), 164–70.

There are, at least, two difficulties with this *Kōyil Oḷuku* account; indeed, it would appear that the account was conveniently “made up” to explain the 1489 inscription. First, Saluva Narasimha had an elder brother, but his name was Timmarāja and no sources other than the temple chronicle associate him with renunciation or temple service. Second, whether KRA was a member of the Kantātai family or a disciple of Kōyil Kantātai Aṇṇaṇ, the Tirumalai reference to him as “Kantātai” in 1456 means he must have been at Śrīraṅgam much earlier than 1489. It is noteworthy that the chronicle nowhere refers to KRA with the honorific “Ayyangār,” calling him rather, “Kantātai Rāmānuja Dāsar,” a name appropriate to a Sāttāda, on the assumption that *ayyangār* designates a brahmin and that Sāttādas are non-brahmin.

KRA is consistently referred to as a disciple of Aḷakiyamaṇavāḷa Jiyar, the latter, by title,²⁵ a renunciate, and traditionally associated with Maṇavāḷamāmuni (1370–1445) and the Varadarājasvāmi temple, Kāñcīpuram. Aḷakiyamaṇavāḷa Jiyar is one of the names of Maṇavāḷamāmuni; but KRA would have been too young to be disciple to Maṇavāḷamāmuni himself. The *Periyatirumuṭi Aṭaiṇu* records that Aḷakiyamaṇavāḷa was disciple to Paravastu Bhaṭṭarpirān Jiyar, the latter himself a disciple of Maṇavāḷamāmuni.²⁶ The one reference to Bhaṭṭarpirān Jiyar, in a Tirumalai inscription dated 1493, notes favor to “Bhaṭṭarpirān Jiyar, the disciple of Bhaṭṭarpirān Jiyar.”²⁷ Inscriptions dated 1514, 1523, and 1535, record favor to one Bhaṭṭarpirān-Ayyan. “. . . a Sāttāda Ekāki [Ekāṅgi?—see below] Śrīvaiṣṇava and a disciple of Paravastu Aṇṇaṇ.”²⁸ We note the characteristic Sāttāda honorific, “*ayyan*”; the names Bhaṭṭarpirān and Paravastu, which associate these persons with Paravastu Bhaṭṭarpirān; and the *ek-āṅgi* status of the disciple, strongly suggesting, although not insuring, that the guru, Paravastu Aṇṇaṇ, is a renunciate, in charge of a mutt. Given that the disciple of the disciple of Paravastu Bhaṭṭar Pirān (namely, KRA) was

a Sāttāda, we may reasonably conclude that the entire line was Sāttāda. The *Periyatirumuṭi Aṭaiṇu* says that Paravastu Bhaṭṭar Pirān Jiyar was a vaidika brahmin. However, a 1612 inscription at Śrīraṅgam records a gift to support offerings during the recitation of the *Tiruvāymoli* on a day special to Rāmānuja. The gift was given by one Jiyar Rāmānuja Jiyar, also known as Rāmānuja-dāsa, and given in the name of his guru Yatindra-pravaṇaprabhāva Piḷḷai Lokācārya Jiyar, the disciple of Paravastu Nayinar Ācārya of Tiruveṅkaṭam (Tirupati).²⁹ The *Śrīvaiṣṇavasiddhāntadīpikā*, written around 1700 by one Vadhula Kantātai Rāmānujācārya, argues the case of Sāttāda Śrīvaiṣṇavism and the authority of Paravastu Kantopāyantrumunindra Jiyar, said to be the seventh head of the Paravastu Mutt, which began with Paravastu Bhaṭṭarpirān Jiyar. The text lists the above mentioned Nayinar Ācārya as fourth in the line, which placement is consistent with his appearance at Śrīraṅgam in 1612.³⁰

²⁹ *South Indian Inscriptions*, ed. H. K. Narasimhaswamy (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1982), 24.523: 505 [= vol. 24, no. 523, p. 505].

³⁰ The *Śrīvaiṣṇava Siddhānta Dīpikā*, ed. C. Alagsingara Pandit (Madras: Haddon and Co., 1918), 70–73, declares the authority of the lineage from Nammālvār (Śrī Parāṅkuṣa Paramācārya) to Śrīmat Paravastu Kantopāyantru Munindra Jiyar—Rāmānuja is seventh in line from Nammālvār, Maṇavāḷamāmuni seventh from Rāmānuja and Kantopāyantru seventh from Maṇavāḷamāmuni. Kantopāyantru is a complete ācārya in all respects and the one who has firmly established Sāttāda Śrīvaiṣṇavism. He is the one whose feet must be taken by Sāttādas, following the example of Madhurakavi toward Nammālvār and the teaching of Piḷḷai Lokācārya concerning the necessity of having the grace of the ācārya. Rāmānuja perfected himself at the feet of 1) Nammālvār, 2) Tirukacchi Nambi, “. . . the first follower of the Vaiṣṇava Darśana . . .,” who gave Rāmānuja the six teachings, and 3) Piḷḷai Urangāvilli Dāsar, and revived Sāttāda Śrīvaiṣṇavism. He installed images of Parāṅkuṣa (Nammālvār) and instructed Sāttādas to worship them. According to the *Dīpikā*, the Draviḍa Veda was revealed through Nammālvār to show the easy way to mokṣa, especially for women, sūdras and the downtrodden. Nammālvār communicated this truth to Vadama Smārta brahmins in a special revelation through Nāthamuni. These brahmins, afraid that evil persons would misuse this truth, kept it secret. Other brahmins discarded their thread and top-knot and openly proclaimed this “True Heritage of the Conqueror of the Evil Humor” (*śaṭajit* [after Śaṭakopa = Nammālvār]-*sat-sampradāya*); these are the Sāttādas (the Vadamās being the Sāttinas) and they stand in the ancient Parama Ekānta tradition of “those who have renounced all associations (*sarva-saṅgha-parityāgi*), those who as temple-servants were

²⁵ *Jiyar/ciyam*, “lion,” is a title taken by Śrīvaiṣṇava saṃnyāsis who are heads of mutts (*maṭhādhipati/siṅhāsanaṇapati*).

²⁶ Kandadai Naiyan, *Periyatirumuṭi Aṭaiṇu*, printed with and under the title of *Ārāyirappaṭi Guruparamparāprabhāvam*, ed. Krishnaswami Ayyangar (Tirucchi: Srinivasam Press, 1975), 607. See also *TTDES*, 3.101:203, and *Tirupati Devasthanam Epigraphical Glossary*, 4.2 of *TTDES*, 37. All translations from this text are my own.

²⁷ *TTDES*, 2.102:212–13.

²⁸ *TTDES*, 3.102, 156:208–10, 324–26; 4.59:116–19. *Periyatirumuṭi Aṭaiṇu*, 610, says Paravastu Annan was a disciple of Paravastu Bhaṭṭar Pirān Jiyar.

KRA's successor at Tirumalai was Kantātai Mādhavayyāṅgār:

... Saka year 1442, We, the Sthanattar of Tirumalai have registered this silasasanam in favour of Kandadai Madhavayyāṅgar, the disciple and successor of Kandadai Ramanujayyāṅgar, who was the manager of Ramanujakutams established at Tirumalai and in Tirupati, and the agent of the gold treasury ...³¹

K. Mādhava also appears in a Śrīraṅgam inscription dated 1500, as the disciple of KRA, the *dharmakārṭṭ* of the Śrīraṅgam and Tirupati *rāmānujakūṭams*.³² K. Mādhava is succeeded at Tirumalai-Tirupati by KRA's son, first mentioned as Kumāra Rāmānujāyāṅgār and later as Kantātai Rāmānujāyāṅgār.³³ A KRA, presumably the son of the original KRA, presented gold coins to Varadarājasvāmi at Kāñcīpuram, 1530,³⁴ was entrusted with endowments at Śrīraṅgam, 1532, and in 1538 was serving as the overseer of the Varadarājasvāmi temple, Kāñcīpuram.³⁵ The latter is the last refer-

ence to a KRA at Kāñcīpuram. The final reference to a KRA at Tirumalai-Tirupati—1534—is to one Kantātai Ariya Rāmānujāyāṅgār, who must have succeeded Kumāra Kantātai Rāmānujāyāṅgār at this temple.³⁶

KRA's most frequently referenced disciples are called "Sāttāda Ekāki Śrīvaiṣṇavas." *Ekāki*, literally, "one alone, a solitary person," is not a term used in present day Śrīvaiṣṇavism; it occurs as a title for others besides Sāttādas and is interpreted by Virarāghavācārya as meaning "person without family who has dedicated his entire life to temple service."³⁷ The term may easily be confused with *ekāṅgi* (Tam. *ēkāṅki*, a nasalization of *ekāki*?), which occurs less frequently in the Tirumalai-Tirupati inscriptions, but also in relation to both Sāttādas and others. The above mentioned Bhaṭṭarpi-rān-ayyan is, in one text (no. 102, dated 1514), called an *ekāki* and, in another (no. 156, dated 1523), called *ekāṅgi*;³⁸ the *Tamil Lexicon* defines *ekāṅgi*: 1) "a class of Vaiṣṇava devotees"; and 2) "a single person, one who has no family"; Winslow's *Tamil-English Dictionary* says: 1) "a single person, bachelor (brahmachāri)"; and 2) "an ascetic, monk (*saṁnyāsi*)."³⁹ Thus, both sources allow the equivalency of *ekāṅgi* with *ekāki*. At the same time, the *Lexicon*'s first and Winslow's second definition indicate that *ekāṅgi* has a specialized meaning for some Vaiṣṇavas; indeed, both historical evidence and present day understanding indicate that an *ekāṅgi* is a renunciate (perhaps not an ascetic or a *saṁnyāsi*, however) and that the term signifies "one having a single distinguishing mark."⁴⁰ This mark, according to present day *ekāṅgis* at Tirupati and documents of the Kantātai Rāmānuja Mutt tradition, is the wearing of a white loincloth and a saffron upper garment or simply a strip of saffron cloth; the "single mark" is the single piece of saffron cloth,⁴⁰ whereas the *saṁnyāsi* wears two pieces of saffron (top and bottom).

called "Viṣṇu-muṇḍaka brahmins"—"brahmins renounced (to serve) Viṣṇu." "Sāttādas" are brahmin only; Śrīvaiṣṇavas of the other castes are called *kulaśekhara* (kṣatriyas), *trivarnika* (vaiśyas), *nāmadhari* (śūdras) and *tirukulattar* (pañcamas). The *Dīpikā* continues, noting that Rāmānuja sought initiation (*pañca-saṁskāra*) from the low-born Tirukacchinambi, who refused to give it, urging Rāmānuja not to compromise his standing with brahmins. Even though Rāmānuja taught and outwardly followed the vaidika brahmin way, including the taking of *saṁnyāsa*, he had, in fact, renounced Vedic karmas; that is to say, in order to communicate with the Vadama brahmins he assumed an appropriate posture. In renewing the tradition, he assigned the Sāttādas to teach the Śaṭajit siddhānta to non-brahmins and to take care of the worship of the Lord in shrines and temples. The foot-water (*śrī-pāda-tīrtha*) and food-remnant (*ucchiṣṭa*) of Sāttādas is most sanctifying.

It is clear that the *Śrīvaiṣṇava Siddhānta Dīpikā* belongs to the tradition of Piḷḷai Lokācārya and Maṇavāḷamūni, and it expressly argues the case for the Paravastu Mutt lineage and for Sāttāda Śrīvaiṣṇavism; perhaps, under duress, i.e., in a struggle for leadership of the Śrīvaiṣṇava community and, specifically, control of the temples.

³¹ TTDES, 3.142:297–99.

³² South Indian Inscriptions 24.357:355–56.

³³ TTDES, 4.1, 3:1–7.

³⁴ SII (Madras: Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, 1953), 1.378:363.

³⁵ Cited in K. V. Raman, "Kandadai Ramanuja-Ayyangar," *Bharatiya Vidya* 29 (1969): 34–35.

³⁶ TTDES, 4.34:70–71. The editor, evidently because of the term *ariya*, attempts to explain this personage as "... one of the ācārya-puruṣas or religious teachers residing in Tirupati. ..." This is an unlikely explanation.

³⁷ *History of Tirupati* (Tirupati: Tirumalai-Tirupati Devasthanams Press, 1954), 2:660–61.

³⁸ TTDES, 3.102, 156:208–10, 324–26; 4:59:116–19.

³⁹ See my "The Practice of Renunciation in Śrīvaiṣṇavism," *The Journal of Oriental Research* LXII (1992): 77–95.

⁴⁰ It has been suggested to me that *eka-aṅgi* is a mixture of Sanskrit *eka* and Tamil *aṅki*—"cloth"; thus, "one cloth"; but the form cannot serve, as it must, to refer to "one who wears only one piece of cloth."

It is possible that the early *ekāṅgis* were householder-renunciates; such are mentioned in the traditional biographies as among the disciples of Rāmānuja. The *Samayācāra-curukum* of Vadikesari Veṅkaṭācārya, part of a Sāttāda literature possibly dating from KRA's time, defines an *ekāṅgin* as a *vānaprastha*—he has a wife, wears a saffron upper garment and a white lower garment which he receives as a disciple of a Śrīvaiṣṇava saṁnyāsin, may or may not wear the thread and top-knot and engages in nothing but service in the temple.⁴¹ There is today a Paravastu Mutt at Tirumalai-Tirupati, claimed by Karnataka and Andhra Sāttādas. The mutt is currently without leadership. T. P. Sampath of Tirupati, the son of the last head of the mutt, says that this mutt has been a "*grhastha* mutt" for some time; his father wore the vestment of an *ekāṅgi*, was called a "*jīyar*," and yet, lived the life of a householder. His son, Tiruveṅgaḍa Rāmānujācārya, is in training at the Sanskrit College, Mysore, preparing to assume leadership of the mutt. There is evidence that the Śrīvaiṣṇava temple-mutt institution, under the headship of one called *jīyar*, began with Sāttāda Śrīvaiṣṇavas at Tirumalai-Tirupati in the early 14th century; the earliest mutts were essentially flower gardens and were managed by *jīyars* whose names bear the Sāttāda honorific *ayyan*. A 1540 inscription refers to one such *jīyar*, Yatirājayyan, who is, like KRA, the disciple of Aḷakiyamaṇavāḷa Jiyar and the Chief Overseer (*periya kōyil kēḷvi*) of the Tirumalai temple.⁴² If the early *ekāṅgis* were householder-renunciates, perhaps all Sāttādas were such and their *ekāṅgi* (or, *jīyar*) status specifically explains the practice of giving up the thread and *śikhā*.

As noted, KRA himself is called "Parama Ekāṅgi."⁴³ This latter title allows the possibility that *ekāṅgi* is a variant or corruption of *ekānti*—(the written Tamil *g* and *t* are very similar in form). It is noteworthy that in lists of Rāmānuja's entourage occurring in two different

texts—*Ārāyirappaṭi Guruparamparāprapāvam* (6000 Stanza Guru-Lineage Account)⁴⁴ and *Periyatirumuṭi Aṭaivu* (Longer Genealogical Lists), the first speaks of "12,000 *ekāṅgis*" and the second of "12,000 *ekāntis*" (see below). *Ekānti(n)*, "one solely devoted to one object," and *paramaikānti(n)*, "one supremely devoted to one object," are titles special to Sātvatas/Pāñcarātrins/Bhāgavatas, in the sense of sole devotion to Vāsudeva/Nārāyaṇa. The term *ekāṅgi* may have arisen due to the fact that *ekāntis* came to be distinguished as wearers of one piece of saffron cloth.

KRA, evidently, had householder disciples: perhaps householder-renunciates. A Tirumalai inscription dated 1476⁴⁵ stipulates that a portion of prasādam is regularly to go to the Sāttāda Śrīvaiṣṇavas who tend certain gardens and who reside in the sixteen houses on Kantātai Rāmānujayyāṅgār Street. In addition to providing flowers, KRA's disciples supplied sandal paste, musk, camphor, turmeric paste, areca nut and betel leaves, etc., for temple worship.⁴⁶ They also participated in the recitation of songs of the Ālvārs at the shrine of Rāmānuja, a practice evidently introduced at Tirumalai by KRA. The 1476 inscription noted above also remarks that a share of prasādam is to go to "... the Sāttina Śrīvaiṣṇavas and the Sāttāda Śrīvaiṣṇavas who chant the Prabandhas of the Ālvārs in the shrine of Uḍaiyavar [Rāmānuja]."⁴⁷ *Sāttina*, from Tamil *sattu*, means "wearing," as distinct from *sāttāda*, "not wearing"; presumably, in reference to the sacred thread and top-knot. If the Sāttādas are non-brahmin, then it is noteworthy that they were permitted to recite along with brahmins; it is more likely that *sāttina* and *sāttāda* designate two types of brahmins—those who wear the thread and those who do not; otherwise, why not simply speak of brahmins and sāttādas?

Other Evidences of Sāttādas

To my knowledge the earliest inscriptional reference to Sāttādas, by this name, is in a Tirupati edict of 1442 "... in favour of Karuṇākaradāsar, one of the Sāttāda Śrīvaiṣṇavas of Tirupati."⁴⁸ The edict records a sizable donation by the *dāsar*, the interest on which is to underwrite pūjā-offerings, in perpetuity—"... as long as the

⁴¹ The *Samayācāra-curukum*, 94–95, defines Sāttāda saṁnyāsins as those who strictly follow the *nivṛtti mārga*—totally surrendered to Nārāyaṇa, wearing saffron (*kāśaya*) only, they give up the thread because they give up the practice of Vedic rituals and because the strands of the thread represent gods other than Nārāyaṇa. In giving up the thread, the text points out, Sāttāda saṁnyāsins are more akin to followers of Śaṅkara and Madhva than to the brahmin *tridaṇḍins* who follow Rāmānuja.

⁴² *TTDES*, 4.151:277.

⁴³ *Annual Report of Epigraphy* (Government of Madras, 1939), 13.

⁴⁴ Pinpalakiya Perumāl Jiyar, *Ārāyirappaṭi Guruparamparāprabhāvam*, ed. Sri Krishnaswami Ayyangar (Tiruchchi: Srinivasm Press, 1975). All translations from this text are my own.

⁴⁵ *TTDES*, 2.68:129–38.

⁴⁶ *TTDES*, 2.81:154–55 and 2.22:35–36.

⁴⁷ *TTDES*, 2.68.

⁴⁸ *TTDES*, 1.211:212–13.

moon and sun endure." This record indicates that Sāttāda Śrīvaiṣṇavas exist at least somewhat before KRA's coming to prominence. As well as the several Sāttāda jiyars mentioned between 1520 and 1545, there is mention in a 1536 inscription of one Aḷakiyamaṇavāḷayyan, "... of the Kauśika gotra, Āpastamba sūtra and Yajus śākhā and a disciple of Aḷakiyamaṇavāḷa Jiyar,"⁴⁹ clearly a brahmin Sāttāda. Beyond the time of KRA and his successors, a Śrīraṅgam inscription of 1636⁵⁰ records a gift from one Emaluranar, "... a temple-sāttāda Vaiṣṇava (*tiruppati sāttāta vaiṣṇava*). . . ." Again, at Śrīraṅgam, in 1665, there is a record of the gift of one Muddirai-Rāman, son of Aḷakiyasiṅkar, a Sāttāda Vaiṣṇava of the Śrīvatsa gotra.⁵¹ The reference to the Śrīvatsa gotra appears to give us a clear reference to a brahmin Sāttāda. If so, it is all the more remarkable that both inscriptions refer only to "Vaiṣṇava" rather than "Śrīvaiṣṇava." Both the *Kōyil Oḷuku* and the *Periyatirumuṭi Aṭaivu* appear to refer consistently to Sāttādas as merely "Vaiṣṇava."

The Śrīraṅgam temple chronicle, *Kōyil Oḷuku*, mentions Sāttādas with reference to the activities of Rāmānuja (1017–1137). The chronicle, as it stands, was likely composed only in the 18th century; but the text is based on much older records, one of which, the *Ārāyirappaṭi Guruparamparāprapāvam*, may date from the early 13th century.⁵² Even so, it is difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish clearly what is early and what is late; much of what is said about the early period may be a projection back from a later time.

The chronicle lists and describes the duties of: 1) ten classes of Śrīvaiṣṇava servants, 2) the Ekāṅgis, 3) the Sāttādamudalis, 4) the Vēttirapāṇis and 5) ten classes of low-caste servants—which five groupings, according to the chronicle, constituted those serving the Śrīraṅgam temple as organized by Rāmānuja. The briefer and probably older of two *Kōyil Oḷuku* texts⁵³ does not clearly distinguish brahmin and non-brahmin among these servants. The more elaborate description of servants' duties in the longer text⁵⁴ specifies that the ten

groups of Śrīvaiṣṇava servants and the Vēttirapāṇis were brahmin and the ten groups of low-caste servants were śūdra. We note that it is only this brahmin category that is referred to as "Śrīvaiṣṇava," and this seems to be consistent throughout the chronicle. In describing a ritual important to the duties of the chief overseer, the longer text says:

Then *tīrtham* and *śaṭakopan* would be offered to all the Jiyars, the Śrīvaiṣṇavas, the Ekāṅgis, the Sāttādamudalis and others. Before the days of Uḍayavar these were addressed merely as "Śrīvaiṣṇavas."⁵⁵

The text, here, abruptly goes on to another subject. Does this mean that it was Rāmānuja (Uḍayavar) who introduced exclusivism into Śrīvaiṣṇavism, distinguishing the *smārta* brahmins as the "true" Śrīvaiṣṇavas?

The Ekāṅgis and the Sāttādamudalis of the chronicle are not associated with any caste. "Mudali" is an honorific meaning "head" or "chief," or alternatively, "honored," "distinguished." In the first sense the title probably indicates that there were other Sāttādas. The translator, Hari Rao, calls all non-brahmins "sāttāda," but there is no warrant for this in the text. In the second sense, the title may indicate that Sāttādas are unusually respected persons, either because they are non-brahmins, yet quite distinguished, or because they are a special kind of brahmin. Clearly, the Sāttādamudalis are distinct from either the brahmin or the śūdra groups. They may be a special category of brahmin or distinguished non-brahmins, yet not śūdras. The *Oḷuku* labels them "outsiders, foreigners" (*deśāntari*)—presumably, "those not native to Śrīraṅgam." Four of the Ekāṅgis are also called *deśāntari*.⁵⁶ (Where are these "outsiders" from? Are they from Tirupati, having come to Śrīraṅgam with Kantāṭai Rāmānujajyāṅgār, their existence in Rāmānuja's time being a projection back from what prevailed later?)

According to the chronicle, the Sāttādamudalis have the "permanent" duties of decorating the mandapams with flowers, making and offering garlands, arranging for the start of the procession of the Āḷvārs, following behind the *Prabandham* reciters, reciting the last two lines of each stanza, "bearing the Rāmānujan sword and acting as the bodyguard of the Jiyars and the Śrīvaiṣṇavas."⁵⁷ They are also mentioned as carrying the images of the Āḷvārs in procession when the latter are honored

⁴⁹ TTDES, 4.71:139.

⁵⁰ SII 24.531:511.

⁵¹ SII, 24.544:524.

⁵² B. V. Ramanujan, *History of Vaishnavism in South India Upto Ramanuja* (Chidambaram: Annamalai University, 1973), 48–49.

⁵³ Ed. Sri Krishnaswami Ayyangar Swami (Tirucchi: Srinivasam Press, 1976).

⁵⁴ Ananda Press, 1909. V. N. Hari Rao's translation follows this text.

⁵⁵ KO, translation, 60.

⁵⁶ KO, text, 44; translation, 50.

⁵⁷ KO, translation, 89.

on their birthdays.⁵⁸ Among the Śrīvaiṣṇava groups (presumably, brahmins) are the Dāsanambis, whose duties include planting and tending flower gardens, making garlands, decorating the palanquin for procession and carrying torches, one “... a huge torch, the *dāsari paṇḍam*”⁵⁹ They are also known as “Puṇḍarīka-dāsa,” the name for a community of flower-provisioners to which Toṇḍaraḍipoḍi Ālvār belonged.⁶⁰ The Vēttirapāṇis, “mace-holders” (also brahmin), go before the procession, keeping order with gold and silver rods and canes, organizing the Śrīvaiṣṇavas “... according to their qualifications to receive the prasādam . . . ,” commanding silence before the beginning of *Prabandham* recitation and “reciting panegyrics.”⁶¹ The activities of present day Sāttādas at *divyadeśa* temples incorporate the key elements of activities ascribed to the three of these early groups, combined; and, we remind ourselves that the Sāttādas today are alternatively called “Dāsanambis.” Does this mean that, over time, certain brahmins became non-brahmins or that the ancient Sāttādas (here, the Sāttādamudalis) were indeed a special class of brahmins?

The *Ārāyirappaṭi Guruparamparāprapāvam* lists Sāttādamudalis along with twenty other Mudalis. All but four have “Dāsar” names and “Dāsar” appears only with respect to Mudalis in the list of 179 disciples.⁶² The *Tamil Lexicon* and Thurston’s *Castes and Tribes* . . .⁶³ indicate that the other Mudalis are sub-divisions of the Veļāḷas, considered to be either śūdra or vaiśya. We then note two points: that Sāttādas characteristically, but not exclusively, use the “Dāsar” name and others who anciently used this title were certain sub-groups of the Veļāḷa. If all these “Mudalis” are Veļāḷa, what makes them “Mudali” and why are some Veļāḷa singled out as “those who do not wear . . . ?”

Summing up Rāmānuja’s following, the 6000 says:

... seven hundred adherents of the highest āśrama (*uttama-ācārāmikaḷ*), seventy-four ācārya-puruṣas firm on lion-thrones, innumerable Sāttina- and Sāttāda-⁶⁴

mudalis, and three hundred female ascetics (*koṟṟiyammai*).⁶⁵

It is possible that *sāttina* and *sāttāda* here identify all of the brahmin and non-brahmin male devotees who are completely dedicated to temple service and are not samnyāsis or ācāryas; or, the terms signify two types of brahmins.

Some of the names in the 6000’s list of Sāttādamudalis are of interest: Śrī Kulaśekhara Perumāl, Bhaṭṭar Pirān Dāsar [Paṭṭar Pirān Tācar], Pākaivillidāsar, Śrīvilliputtūrdāsar, Śrī Nārāyaṇa Dāsar, Śrī Govardhanadāsar, Tiruvalutivalanadudāsar, Śrī Rāmānuja Dāsar, Piḷḷai Uraṅgāvilli Dāsar, Vaṇṭar, Cuntar and Rāmānuja Vēḷaikkārar.⁶⁶ Kulaśekhara Perumāl and Bhaṭṭar Pirān call to mind Ālvārs, the latter being a title for Periyālvār, who tended flowers. Piḷḷai Uraṅgāvilli Dāsar was guardian of the treasury and belonged to a caste of wrestlers; Rāmānuja used to lean on him returning from the bath. Although he is not in the list, the 6000 speaks of Tirukacchi Nambi (Kāñcīpūrṇa) as a *sāttāda-var*.⁶⁷ According to the biography, Rāmānuja sought initiation with Tirukacchi, a śūdra (? the text here actually says “non-vaidika”) devotee of Lord Varadarāja of Kāñcīpuram, and failing in that, invited Tirukacchi to eat at his home so that he (Rāmānuja) might partake of the grace of his leavings.

The *Periyatirumuṭi Aṭaivu* (16th century) may shed some light on the above issues. It sums up Rāmānuja’s entourage as:

12,000 ekāntis . . . 74 ācārya-puruṣas, 700 jīyars, a multitude of Sāttinas and Sāttādas, and innumerable Sāttinamudalis and Sāttādamudalis, Tirunāmadharis led by Piḷḷai Uraṅkāvilli Dāsar, and Tirunāmadhari women led by Ponnacchiyar.⁶⁸

We notice: 1) “12,000 ekāntis” rather than the “12,000 ekāṅgis” of the *Kōyil Oḷuku* and 6000 *Guruparamparam*; 2) both Sāttina/Sāttāda and Sāttinamudali/Sāttādamudali, whereas in the inscriptions, chronicles and biographies it has been one or the other only; 3) Piḷḷai Uraṅkāvilli Dāsar, whom all sources consider śūdra and who is listed in the 6000 as a Sāttādamudali, is here

⁵⁸ KO, translation, 52; text, 45.

⁵⁹ KO, translation, 88.

⁶⁰ KO, text, 44.

⁶¹ KO, translation, 89–90.

⁶² 6000 *Guruparamparam*, 269.

⁶³ *Tamil Lexicon*, rpt. (Madras: University of Madras, 1982). E. Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India* (Madras: Government Press, 1909), 7.

⁶⁴ The term here and in the above listing of disciples is *sāṛṇina* and *sāṛṇāda*, colloquial back-forms of *sāttina* and *sāttāda*.

⁶⁵ 6000 *Guruparamparam*, 271. The *Samayācāra-curukkum*, 75, defines *koṟṟiyamma* as wives who live a disciplined life, refraining from sexual activity while looking on their husbands as fathers.

⁶⁶ 6000 *Guruparamparam*, 269.

⁶⁷ 6000 *Guruparamparam*, 167.

⁶⁸ *Periyatirumuṭi*, 576; my translation.

leader of a new category: "those who wear the Vaiṣṇava forehead mark (*nāmam*).⁶⁹ There is no mention of brahmins, except we take Sāttinamudali and Sāttina as such; then, Sāttādas are either other brahmins or "pure" śūdras, as distinct from the other śūdras, i.e., the Tirunāmadharis. In the list of names that follows this general statement, the category "Śrīvaiṣṇavas, led by Koṭṭaiyammaraiaṅkar" is followed by the category "Sāttāda Vaiṣṇava," inclusive of several "dāsar" as found in the 6000 list of Sāttādamudalis; then, come the Tirunāmadharis led by Piḷḷai Uraṅkāvilli Dāsar and finally the female Tirunāmadharis led by Uraṅkāvilli's wife. This arrangement appears to say that Sāttinamudali and Sāttina equals Śrīvaiṣṇava, Sāttādamudali and Sāttāda are just Vaiṣṇava, not Śrīvaiṣṇava, and "Tirunāmadhari," while related to Viṣṇu, is neither "Vaiṣṇava" nor "Śrīvaiṣṇava." As we shall see below, Sāttāda literature offers two hierarchies of Śrīvaiṣṇavas: one says that the Sāttādas are brahmin, the Kulaśekharas are kṣatriya, the Trivarnikas are vaiśyas and the Nāmadharis are śūdra. The other says that all are Sāttāda; brahmin Sāttādas are called Sāttādamudali, kṣatriya Sāttādas are called Kulaśekharas, etc.⁶⁹

In the light of contemporary understanding and historical evidence we can reasonably assume that inscriptional reference to persons bearing the honorific *ayya* is reference to Sāttādas or those who come to be known as Sāttādas. It is possible that *dāsanambi* and *dāsar* are always references to Sāttādas or those who come to be known as such; the latter (*dāsar*) certainly is a title never used publicly by Śrīvaiṣṇava brahmins, consistently used by Sāttādas, and possibly also by non-sāttāda śūdras and pañcamas. In the *Kōyil Oḷuku*, certain "Dāsar" names occur in two other categories of brahmin servants—Tirupparkadal Dāsar, among the Tiruppatiyar (the group from whom the chief overseer is chosen), and Tiruttalvarai Dāsar, Tirukkurugur Dāsar, Nalukavippermāl Dāsar, Śaṭakopa Dāsar, Tirukkalikaṅṅi Dāsar and Rāmānuja Dāsar, among the Tiruppāni-saivar (a particular type of *arcaka*). Are these personages, in fact, Sāttādas?

According to the *Periyatirumuṭi Aṭaivu*, Nāthamuni, the disciple of Parāṅkuśa Dāsa, had "dāsar" disciples: Piḷḷai Karuṇākara Dāsar and Nambi Karuṇākara Dāsar.⁷⁰ Among Yāmuna's disciples were: Tirukāṭci Nampi alias Gajendra Dāsar, Tirukkurukūr Dāsar, Govinda Dāsar,

Nāthamuni Dāsar and Periya Nambi alias Parāṅkuśa Dāsar.⁷¹ Nampiḷḷai (the guru of Piḷḷai Lokācārya) is known as Tirukkalikaṅṅi Dāsar; Piḷḷai Lokācārya had several "dāsar" disciples, one of whom—Kollikāvali Dāsar—was the father of Maṇavālamāmuni's mother.⁷²

Possibly relevant inscriptional references to *dāsar*, *dāsanambi*, and *ayya* include a Śrīraṅgam text of 1316, recording the sale of garden plots to certain brahmin arcakas (*paṭṭan/bhaṭṭan*) by Śrīvaikuṇṭha Dāsan, Kōyilponmeynda Perumāl Dāsan, Vaṇ Śaṭakopa Dāsan (or Tam. Tātaṅ), Piṇṇaguvāli Aḷagiya Perumāl Dāsan and Anukkavilli Dāsan, all of whom are *dāsanambis* at Śrīraṅgam (*tiruvaraṅkam tiruppati*).⁷³ A 1557 Śrīraṅgam inscription records a gift of land by Ekāṅgi Narasiṅgaya.⁷⁴

In a 1359 Kāñcīpuram (Varadarājasvāmi temple) inscription we find reference to one Perumāl Tādan, who is the supervisor of the temple and upon whose representation the Lord has granted to the Vaiṣṇavadāsa, hereafter known as Brahmatantrasvatantra Jiyar, a mutt (*maṭha*, *maṭam*), land-endowment, library, right to conduct worship, etc., so that he may propagate the "Rāmānuja-darśana."⁷⁵ Brahmatantrasvatantra Jiyar is considered to be the founder of the Parakāla Mutt jiyar-lineage. The inscription may indicate that the jiyar as well as the supervisor are Sāttādas. According to the *Guruparamparāprabhāvam* (3000) written by the third Brahmatantrasvatantra Jiyar (15th century) the original name of the first jiyar was Viravalli Perarulāl-ayyan; he belonged to the Kauṇḍinya gotra and was a disciple of Vedānta Deśika.⁷⁶ This could mean that Brahmatantrasvatantra was a brahmin Sāttāda. In later times the jiyars of Parakāla Mutt are clearly Vāṭakalai brahmins.

At Melkote (the Tirunārāyaṇa temple) there is mention of Govinda Dāsa, Śrīrāma Dāsa and Śrīraṅga Dāsa, Śrīvaiṣṇavas who received a grant of a village from the local ruler in 1310.⁷⁷ Here too, in inscriptions of 1504, 1521, 1610 and 1640, we find reference to several "ayyas," one of whom is the junior manager of the

⁷¹ *Periyatirumuṭi*, 569.

⁷² *Periyatirumuṭi*, 602–5.

⁷³ *SH*, 24.229–35:252–58.

⁷⁴ *SH*, 24.480:459.

⁷⁵ N. Desikacharya, *The Origin and Growth of Śrī Brahmatantra Parakāla Mutt* (Bangalore: The Bangalore Press, 1949), xii–xv.

⁷⁶ (Madras: LIFCO, 1968), 225–27. This is the authoritative *guruparamparam* chronicle for Vāṭakalai Śrīvaiṣṇavas.

⁷⁷ *Epigraphia Carnatica* (Mysore: Institute of Kannada Studies, University of Mysore, 1974), 3.152:123, 623.

⁶⁹ See discussion of *Śrīvaiṣṇava Siddhānta Dipikā*, note 31, and *Abhyudayam*, Souvenir of the Seventh All India Sathada Srīvaiṣṇava Conference, Bangalore, 1980.

⁷⁰ *Periyatirumuṭi*, 565.

Tirunārāyaṇa temple, another, the minister of Kṛṣṇadevarāya, the Vijayanagar ruler; yet another is the chief of Mysore.⁷⁸ Two fifteenth-century Melkote inscriptions⁷⁹ are interesting for a different reason. They refer to “supreme vaidika (Vedic) Śrīvaiṣṇava brahmins (*paramavaidikaśrīvaiṣṇavabrāhmaṇa*);” evidently emphasizing either that Śrīvaiṣṇava brahmins are Vedic or that some Śrīvaiṣṇava brahmins (others [Sāttādas?] are not).

The earliest record I have found that can be construed in relation to Sāttāda Śrīvaiṣṇavism is an inscription of 1276, at the Saumyanātha temple (Mysore area), recording an agreement between the local ruling body and one Ulakamuṇṭōṅ Tācar [Dāsar], a member of the Śrīvaiṣṇava assembly (*variyaṁ*). The dāsar is granted use of a garden from which he is to supply flower garlands to the temple.⁸⁰ For the same year, there is record of a similar arrangement with Ulakamuṇṭōṅ Tācar and Kēcavapperumālpiḷḷai Cokkan Dāsar. The garden they are to establish and cultivate is to be called “the Rāmānuja temple garden (*tirunantaṇavaṇam*).”⁸¹ In a 1293 inscription at the same temple, there is mention of “dāsanambis,” who are to supply flower garlands and vegetables to the temple daily.⁸²

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Sāttāda Śrīvaiṣṇavism is a complex phenomenon, much deserving of further study. Conclusions concerning its origin and early development can, at best, be tentative. The “hard,” i.e., inscriptional, evidence indicates an origin at Tirupati in the fifteenth century, under the leadership of Kantāṭai Rāmānujāyāṅgār, who enjoyed the patronage of Vijayanagar rulers and whose activities had a significant impact on religious life at Śrīraṅgam and Kāñcīpuram as well as Tirupati. Burton Stein has presented the Sāttādas of Tirupati as Velāḷa sūdras who, already enjoying prominence in temple affairs, experienced enhanced status under royal patronage and sought respect comparable to that given the

brahmin.⁸³ Stein’s remarks are brief, not well documented and based on only a small part of the evidence; his identification of the Sāttādas as Velāḷas is based on Hari Rao’s interpretation of the *Kōyil Oḷuku*, an interpretation we have shown to be suspect. At the same time, we have noticed that the 6000 *Guruparamparam* associates Sāttādas with several Velāḷa groups and we must recognize that many Velāḷas, considered by others to be sūdra, are traditionally farmers and traders and claim the status of vaiśya, ritually imitating brahmins.⁸⁴ With the patronage of Saluva Narasiṃha, certain Velāḷas may have come into such prominence in the temples, that alongside of brahmin temple-servants, they came to be designated “not wearing,” and the brahmins in close relationship to these non-brahmins came to be designated *sāttina*. The title *sāttāda* may have been given by brahmins by way of distinguishing those non-brahmins who were considered acceptable in temple service—persons who look and act like brahmins (or, at least, twiceborn) but are not. Or, more likely, these Velāḷas, who apparently controlled the temple prior to brahmin influence, may have named themselves *sāttāda*, by way of indicating that even though they do not wear the thread, they are nonetheless qualified for temple service. As brahmins came into increasing prominence and power in the temple, the Sāttāda Velāḷas, necessarily, would have attempted to consolidate and enhance their status with reference to the brahmin lifestyle, claiming high purity by reason of *pāñcarātra dikṣā* and possession of Veda in the form of the *Nālāyira Divya Prabandham* and performing all domestic rituals with prabandhams rather than Sanskrit mantras.⁸⁵

⁸³ “Social Mobility and Medieval South Indian Hindu Sects,” *Social Mobility in the Caste System in India: An Interdisciplinary Symposium*, ed. J. Silverberg (Paris: Mouton, 1968), 78–94. See also, Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980), 233.

⁸⁴ David G. Mandelbaum, *Society in India* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970), 2:458–60. See also André Beteille, *Caste, Class and Power* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965), 8–85, 97.

⁸⁵ It is worth note that a recent non-brahmin Śrīvaiṣṇava renunciate, Bhuvanagiri Śrīmat Aḷagiya Maṇavāla Rāmānuja Ekāṅgi Svāmi (1868–1927), defines Sāttina and Sāttāda Śrīvaiṣṇavas in the course of expounding “. . . the Velāḷar caste way of the South Indian Śrīvaiṣṇava sampradāya, having Śrīmad Nammālvār as its preeminent āchārya” (*Śrī Vaiṣṇava Dipikai* [Madras: Ratnam Press, 1968], 15). The swāmi was a Naidu and does not identify himself as a Sāttāda, but clearly associates himself with Sāttāda tradition, showing, at the least,

⁷⁸ *Epigraphia Carnatica*, 85, 88, 69 and 90, respectively.

⁷⁹ *Epigraphia Carnatica*, ed. Lewis Rice (Bangalore: Mysore Government Central Press, 1905), 9.86, 89:26–27, 55–57.

⁸⁰ *South Indian Inscriptions*, ed. Shri G. V. Srinivasa Rao (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1979), 23.591: 411–12.

⁸¹ *SHI*, 23.593:413–14.

⁸² *SHI*, 23.594:415–16.

KRA was energetic in establishing and enhancing at Tirumalai-Tirupati regular and special pūjās for the Ālvārs and recitation of the songs of the Ālvārs within the temple, the latter performed by Sāttinas and Sāttādas together. Recognition of the Ālvārs and the *Prabandham* in the temple was based not only on the fact that certain of the Ālvārs sang about the Lord of Tirupati-Tirumalai but also the belief that the songs of Nammālvār constitute the Tamil Veda, as argued by Piḷḷai Lōkācārya and his brother, Aḷakiya Maṇavāla Perumāl Nainar Ācārya and commented upon by Maṇavālamāmuni. Piḷḷai Lōkācārya also argued that, as Bhāgavatas, on equal footing with the Lord by reason of their *śaraṇāgati*, Śrīvaiṣṇavas have no legitimate concern with caste distinctions.⁸⁶ Maṇavālamāmuni was instrumental in developments at Śrīraṅgam, Kāñcīpuram and Tirumalai-Tirupati; Kāñcīpuram Rāmānujāyāṅgār, we recall, was a disciple of a disciple of Maṇavālamāmuni. Thus, Sāttāda Śrīvaiṣṇavism can be seen as a logical result of the theology of Piḷḷai Lōkācārya et al. This theology opens the way for the full participation of non-brahmins in Śrīvaiṣṇavism and may have encouraged certain Veḷāḷas. In the face of what appears to have been a restriction of the term “Śrīvaiṣṇava” to brahmins only, some non-brahmins said, in effect, “We are Śrīvaiṣṇavas; non-thread-wearing Śrīvaiṣṇavas. We have the Veda—the Tamil Veda, as good or better than the Sanskrit Veda, and we are solely dedicated to service of the Lord and his devotees (*bhagavad-bhāgavata-kainkaryam*).”

One problem with this “Veḷāḷa hypothesis” is the fact of hard evidence for brahmin Sāttādas and, for a time, their exercise of the distinction “vaidika” and “non-vaidika.” Recognizing this together with the possible impact of Lōkācārya’s *bhāgavata* theology, we must recognize the possibility that certain brahmin Śrīvaiṣṇavas gave up the thread and top-knot and, along with them, the performance of Vedic rituals, in favor of a life of service in the temple and as purohitas and ācāryas. In this situation, alongside of vaidika brahmin

Śrīvaiṣṇavas, they would have called themselves *sāttāda*, meaning essentially brahmin but non-vaidika. There is also the matter of existence of a sophisticated Sāttāda literature in relation to a lineage of ācāryas, dating, at least, to the sixteenth century. This literature still needs to be fully and carefully examined, but it appears as a logical continuation of Piḷḷai Lōkācārya/Maṇavālamāmuni Śrīvaiṣṇavism and in relation to a practicing community.

Of course, both of the above hypotheses can be valid: Sāttāda Śrīvaiṣṇavism practiced by both brahmin and non-brahmin; indeed, this is what one would expect as the practical implication of the *bhāgavata* theology. Sāttāda Śrīvaiṣṇavism, having had its origin in Telugu country, would have spread with the activities of Maṇavālamāmuni and particularly KRA and his successors and throughout the area of Vijayanagar rule. If we accept that the *Kōyil Oluku* account of Sāttādas is a projection back to Rāmānuja’s time of what actually developed only in the 15th century, this would explain the *Kōyil Oluku* reference to Sāttādamudalis as “outsiders” to Śrīraṅgam. In the course of time, given the weight of vaidika tradition and the slackening of Vijayanagar patronage, the Sāttādas, perhaps never considered the equal of vaidika brahmins, lost ground. They may have been compromised from within by encouraging all manner of followers, but they were also progressively denied arcaka status in the major temples.

What of the claim by some Sāttādas that their tradition is unbroken back to Nammālvār and Parāṅkuṣa Dāsa and, in fact, is the continuing Sātvata-Pāñcarātra heritage? This seems to me to be a reasonable hypothesis. The theology attributed to Piḷḷai Lōkācārya et al. did not arise in a vacuum—without context and precedent. While the term *sāttāda* is not found in inscriptions earlier than the mid-15th century, we have references to Sāttādas in the 6000 *Guruparamparam* and the *Kōyil Oluku* which may represent the situation in the time of Rāmānuja, even if the name *sāttāda* is from a later time. It is, of course, difficult, if not impossible, to determine what, if anything, in the biographies of Rāmānuja and the Śrīraṅgam accounts of his activities actually took place as stated; clearly, much of what appears in these accounts is projected back to (or, simply on to) Rāmānuja as a means of authorizing or validating some relationship, doctrine or behavior that originated in another context. Regardless of what actually were Rāmānuja’s circumstances, the accounts reveal great diversity in the 13th-century (and probably earlier) Vaiṣṇava movement, tensions between theologies and lifestyles and attempts to reconcile differences. We may ask, for instance, why Rāmānuja requires five gurus—except that, long after his time, several different strands

that this tradition is concerned to identify the Sāttāda. The swāmi defines both the Sāttina Vaiṣṇava and the Sāttāda Vaiṣṇava as “prapanna Vaiṣṇavas”; the former wears the top-knot and thread, regularly recites both Sanskrit and Draviḍa Vedas, and performs *sandhyāvandana* and other prescribed *nitya* and *naimittika* *karmas*; the latter (the Sāttāda) does not wear the top-knot and thread and recites only the Tamil Veda [ibid., 35–36].

⁸⁶ See *Śrīvacana Bhāṣaṇa* of Piḷḷai Lōkācārya, ed. and tr. Robert C. Lester (Madras: Kuppaswamy Sastri Research Institute, 1979).

of Vaiṣṇavism are being reconciled in the personage and circumstances of the Bhāṣyakāra? The Pāñcarātra Bhāgavatas, whose case Yāmunācārya argues in his *Āgamaprāmāṇyam*, are good candidates for ancestors of the Śrīraṅgam-Tirupati Sāttādas.

At this point, I tentatively conclude that, indeed, the Sāttādas are the descendants of ancient Bhāgavatas, anti-caste Vaiṣṇavas from all circumstances of birth

and strata of society, most of all the leadership of a Tamil Vaiṣṇava, non-Vedic *bhaktimārga* centered on the temples. The term *sāttāda* must have arisen as vaidika and non-vaidika traditions joined battle for control of the temples. Over the long run, the Sāttādas largely lost the battle, ironically, protecting themselves from total annihilation by becoming a caste along with all the others, albeit relatively prestigious.